

# Quarterly NEWS-LETTER

OF THE BOOK CLUB OF  
CALIFORNIA

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### SUGGESTING A NEW PUBLISHING PROGRAMME

by ALBERT M. BENDER, Chairman, Publication Committee

DURING the period of more than twenty years that I have served as Chairman of the Club's Publication Committee, changing conditions in the publishing world in general have necessitated a number of changes in our own publishing plans. I believe that the time has now come when a definite programme, based on our past experience and intended as a guide for our future publishing activities, is necessary if our publications are to maintain the place they have won for themselves in the past. Accordingly, I am offering for the consideration of

the members some thoughts on what I think the Club's future publishing field should be. These are merely suggestions, and the comment of members is invited, for the primary aim of any publishing programme we may adopt must be that of pleasing them.

A brief review of our publishing activities in the past will help explain the present situation. During our first decade, the problem of what to print, and of how to print it, was much less complicated than it has since become. We then occupied the always interesting position of pioneers; the books we published from 1914 onward were part of a movement that was being sponsored locally by a few individuals on behalf of what was then quaintly called "the book beautiful." Throughout that period, the Club's publications served a double purpose: they helped create a demand among local collectors for books that were fine both in materials and workmanship, and they provided local printers who wished to do work of this type with a wider market for their products.

By the middle '20s, however, conditions had so changed that we were no longer pioneers and innovators. Fine printing had come to be much more appreciated and desired by collectors. To fill a demand for such books—which had hardly existed locally a few years earlier—private presses expanded and multiplied, the general publishers began issuing special limited editions, and our Club (as did similar clubs throughout the country) had to adapt itself to the situation as best it might. For a time, no drastic changes were necessary, for by then we had entered the boom period and our members purchased our publications liberally along with those issued from other sources. After 1929,

however, the necessity for a reconsideration of our programme as regards publications began to grow increasingly evident. During the five years that followed, we gained some valuable hints as to what our future publishing field should be.

Our course is not yet definitely laid out, but I believe its general direction is clearly indicated. We should, of course, continue to maintain a high typographical standard in our publications; such changes as we make should be, not in the physical excellence of our books, but in our choice of texts. Some fields it is no longer necessary for the Club to cultivate. For instance, when we, in 1918, issued our edition of Burton's "The Kasi-dah," this was an excellent choice, for there was then no fine edition of this work; today there are several. This example is typical. With the spread of good printing, desirable editions of all the major and minor English classics have become available to the collector, and the Club may safely leave this field to others. Nor, for obvious reasons, should we seek to compete with general publishers for recent material meriting wide sale, or should we issue fine editions of inferior texts, or on subjects outside our particular sphere, or of interest only to a small number of our members.

Does this indicate that our future publishing field must be a narrow one? By no means! We are the only book collectors club in the West with a regular publishing programme. The mere fact of our geographical position constitutes both an opportunity and a challenge. With the literature of the entire Pacific Coast to draw from, and with the Far East at our door, we are assured of a profusion of opportunities. The only question becomes, how shall we go about making the most

of them? In my opinion, we should begin by recognizing that this is our logical field, and that we should devote our major effort to seeking out and publishing literary material closely identified with this territory, always providing it is important enough, and interesting enough, to merit a fine edition. Books of this general type already form a substantial part of our list. Such volumes as "The Letters of Ambrose Bierce," "The Powell Journal," "Continent's End," Robinson Jeffers' "Poems," and the recently issued PrenticeMulford book —to name but a few—indicate that this is hardly a restricted field.

But it should be far wider. In the future we should not hesitate to assume leadership in the collection and publication of literary and bibliographical material not only of the Pacific Coast but of the vast territory that lies to the west. This is a wide field for the Club, but it is one that if followed over a period of years will assure our publications a unique and distinctive place in the world of books. I am not suggesting, however, that our future books should be devoted exclusively to this field. The programme should be elastic enough to permit publishing whatever material appropriate to the Club's aims we may be fortunate enough to find. But we should have a general guiding policy, one that points in a definite direction.

By adopting such a programme, and by adhering to it, the Club can build up a list that will as time passes prove in every way worthy of our opportunities. Once such a policy is determined upon, the question of what to print will present fewer difficulties, for we shall be proceeding in a definite direction toward a definite goal.

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THE LETTERS OF WESTERN AUTHORS  
WITH the distribution of Part Six, later this month, the Club's series of facsimiles of Western authors' letters will reach its half-way point. Since the appearance of the March number of this quarterly, three parts have been mailed to members: Frank Norris, with comment by Franklin Walker, printed by Johnck & Seeger; a Richard Henry Dana letter, printed by Ward Ritchie, the comment on which was written by James D. Hart; and, in May, John Muir, with comment by Charles Keeler, printed by Schwartz & Company.

Part Six, to appear in June, will reproduce a letter of Henry George, whose "Progress and Poverty," published in San Francisco in 1879, profoundly influenced the economic thought of the country for the next quarter-century. A particular interest attaches to this Henry George letter in the fact that it was written to his close friend, the late Dr. Edward Robeson Taylor, ex-Mayor of San Francisco, who was one of the founders of our Club, and its first President. The comment on the letter will be written by Howard Jay Graham, and the folder will be designed and printed by Taylor & Taylor.

A letter of Joaquin Miller, printed by Bruce McCallister, of Los Angeles, will follow in July. The August folder will probably reproduce a letter of Josiah Royce, with comment by B. H. Lehman, printed by the University of California Press. In September, coinciding with the hundredth anniversary of the birth of the great American humorist, will come a letter of Mark Twain, the design and printing of which will be done by John Henry Nash. Arrangements are being concluded for the remaining parts, and announcements will be made in due course.

## AMATEUR JOURNALISM IN CALIFORNIA

*EDITOR'S NOTE:* San Francisco was one of the centers of the "amateur journal" movement which, more than sixty years ago, engaged the attention of literary-minded youths in all parts of the country, and resulted in the appearance of hundreds of little periodicals, written, edited and—in many cases—printed by the young people themselves.

*The following account of this curious and now almost forgotten chapter in the history of Western publishing is contributed by a member who prefers to remain anonymous.*

PERHAPS type and presses and printers' ink hold no attractions to young people today, but it was a different story a generation or two ago. To the boy in the '60s and '70s, a printing shop was always a mysterious and fascinating place. Like the firehouse and the railroad yards (its only real rivals for his attention) he gravitated toward it at every favorable opportunity. Perfectly content, and consumed with curiosity, he would stand on the sidewalk outside, staring through dusty windows at its disordered interior. No detail of the scene escaped him: the line of wooden typecases with their tilted tops, presided over by lordly compositors (nimble-fingered old fellows who commonly chewed tobacco and wore very dirty aprons); the stone-topped tables where forms were made up and locked and scrubbed, and in the background, the mysterious presses themselves, source of the strange rumbling that was usually to be heard about the place; source, too, of the pungent odor—was it turpentine in the ink?—that the boy always sniffed with relish.

Make no mistake about it, the old-fashioned printing shop was a place to arouse the admiration and envy of any normal boy. It is no wonder that many of them decided to be printers (or at least editors) when they grew up, just as others were determined to drive fire-

engines, or to be locomotive engineers, or even President. The point I am trying to make is that half a century ago a goodly proportion of the youth of the land was very definitely printing minded. So when, about 1870, the amateur journal craze made its appearance, there was a very fertile field waiting, and the idea spread like wildfire.

But before going into the history of the movement, perhaps I should say a word about the papers themselves. I have before me as I write a typical specimen. It is a file of "The Young Californian: An Amateur Paper for Boys and Girls," published in San Francisco in 1872 by a group of four boys, one of whom, F. H. Wheelan, was editor. Originally it was a four-page sheet, set in three columns, with a page size about that of the modern magazine "Time." Its typographical style is strongly reminiscent of the local literary weeklies of the period, notably "The Golden Era," upon which it was probably modeled. Volume I, Number 1 appeared January 1, 1872, and the paper announced itself ready and willing to supply "moral, pleasant and instructive reading matter" to a select clientele.

By following through this file (the paper lasted 12 months), one can trace not only its individual fortunes but those of the whole local group. This is because all the amateur journals devoted a great deal of space to chronicling the activities of their contemporaries. These comments were not always favorable. It was a period of personal journalism, and the amateur editors, like their professional brethren, did not restrict themselves to phrases of mere empty flattery. When he needed to defend his paper from attack, or to put some too-bumptious rival in his place, your amateur editor did

not hesitate to call a spade a spade. In general, however, "The Young Californian" treated its contemporaries with respect. In its second issue it compliments three existing local journals, "The California Clipper," "Far West," and "The Cub," and extends a rather tepid welcome to still another, "Once a Month." The latter, making its bow during the same month as "The Young Californian," had stated that, there being "no really first class" amateur journals in San Francisco, it was setting about to supply the deficiency. Editor Wheelan quotes the passage; his only comment is a philosophical "Time will tell." Evidently time did tell, for I can find no further references to "Once a Month" in the files of the journals it had set out to supplant.

Meanwhile, the affairs of "The Young Californian" had prospered in such degree that in the April number the editor announced that "an unusual press of advertisements and reading matter" had obliged him to issue a supplement, and the size jumped to six pages. The next number welcomed still another newcomer, "The New Planet," a four-page sheet similar in form and contents to "The Young Californian." Having by this time survived five issues, "The Californian's" greeting to this newcomer was just a shade patronizing.

The number of journals springing up naturally suggested an organization of the local amateurs; several such had already been formed in the East. Accordingly, one finds in the August number mention of a proposed Western Amateur Press Association. Editor Wheelan is not enthusiastic. He is, he confesses, "completely in the dark" as to any possible good the new organization might accomplish. Two months later, however, he has been won over to the cause; the October number con-

tains an account of the formation of The California Amateur Press Association, with Wheelan docilely serving on one of the committees. This month the advent of still another pair of papers is announced: "The Bay City" and "The Leisure Moments."

Two editorial notes in this number deserve attention. One announces a new feature, to be called the "Correspondents' Column," and invites readers to send "any question whatever" to be answered by the editors. The other editorial paragraph reads:

San Francisco now boasts of seven amateur journals; five of these are eight pages, and the other two, four. It also boasts of an Amateur Press Association and an innumerable quantity of amateur authors and writers. There are four new papers soon to be started—two in this city and two in Santa Cruz—making, in total, eleven amateur papers. From this it will be seen that San Francisco is not far behind any Eastern city in the number, style and quality of its amateur journals, nor are its boys behind those of the East in forward enterprise of any kind.

When the above was written, the fad was probably at its height locally. At any rate, "The Amateur Journalists' Companion," a yearly directory of such papers, published in Louisville, Ky., lists in its 1873 issue only four in San Francisco, and six in the entire state. It has been said that the introduction of printing departments and of student papers in high schools spelled the final end of the amateur journals. But perhaps they died merely because the fad had begun to wane. In the nature of things, the mortality of such papers was very high. Many, no doubt, fell victim to the financial panic of the early '70s; others suspended because their young editors were growing up, going away to school, or getting jobs—not a few graduating from amateur to professional journalism.

So far as I know, there is only one sizable collection of these curious little papers in existence today. These are bound files, originally in the library of the local organization, The California Amateur Press Association, which long ago maintained a "Clubroom and Library" in the Y. M. C. A. Building, on Sutter Street, near Kearny. I doubt if many collect the little papers today, and probably very few copies of those printed locally are still in existence. If any of my readers should chance to run across a stray number in some cluttered attic or among the debris in the back room of a second-hand shop, let him examine the little sheet with respect and care. It is the proud achievement of some forgotten group of young amateur publishers, who played their interesting game with enthusiasm and energy and good sense, and, we may be sure, with a proper regard for the rules of an honorable profession.

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#### MULFORD'S CALIFORNIA SKETCHES

THE Club's most recent publication, Prentice Mulford's "California Sketches," was completed early in May and copies were sent out promptly to those members who had placed advance orders. This work makes a worthy and interesting addition to the Club's list, both by reason of the importance of its text and the beauty of its design and printing.

The book, produced by John Henry Nash, consists of 132 pages, size  $9\frac{1}{4}$  by  $6\frac{1}{2}$  inches, printed from Garamond type on Van Gelder paper, and bound in green and gold marbled boards with a natural linen back. The edition is of 350 copies and the price per copy is \$5.50. The Club unreservedly recommends this volume as well worthy of being owned—and read—by every member.

## ELECTED TO MEMBERSHIP

THE following new members have been elected since March 1:

<i>Member</i>		<i>Sponsor</i>
Dr. Herman M. Adler	Berkeley, Cal.	Albert M. Bender
Mrs. Newton Bissinger	Menlo Park, Cal.	Mrs. John I. Walter
Dr. Arthur L. Bloomfield	San Francisco, Cal.	Mrs. John I. Walter
The Bohemian Club	San Francisco, Cal.	Marshall Dill
Dr. Margaret Carhart	West L. A., Cal.	Mrs. Frank H. Bennett
Mrs. Leo J. Clayburgh	San Francisco, Cal.	Albert M. Bender
Marshall Dill	San Francisco, Cal.	Albert M. Bender
Henry Eichheim	Santa Barbara, Cal.	Albert M. Bender
Mrs. Henry A. Everett	Pasadena, Cal.	Dr. Aurelia H. Reinhardt
H. Rushton Fairclough	Stanford Univ., Cal.	Albert M. Bender
George Frisbee	San Francisco, Cal.	Secretary
Mrs. James Gerstley	Los Angeles, Cal.	Mrs. John I. Walter
Maurice E. Harrison	San Francisco, Cal.	John Henry Nash
Mrs. Mary B. Kelly	San Francisco, Cal.	John Henry Nash
Charles Kendrick	San Francisco, Cal.	Albert M. Bender
Daniel Koshland, Jr.	San Mateo, Cal.	Albert M. Bender
Robert J. Koshland	San Mateo, Cal.	Albert M. Bender
J. B. Levison	San Francisco, Cal.	John Henry Nash
S. Lowengart	San Francisco, Cal.	Albert M. Bender
David Magee	San Francisco, Cal.	Mrs. John I. Walter
Mrs. Ednah Rich Morse	San Francisco, Cal.	Phil B. Bekeart
Hunter Nicholson	Trona, Cal.	Secretary
Francis W. Payne	Los Angeles, Cal.	John Howell
P. L. Pfaff	San Diego, Cal.	Secretary
Mrs. Elizabeth Gray Potter	Mills College, Cal.	Secretary
Edward Sedgwick	Beverly Hills, Cal.	Jean Hersholt
Mrs. Stanley Sinton, Jr.	San Francisco, Cal.	Mrs. John I. Walter
Selden C. Smith	San Francisco, Cal.	Albert M. Bender
Dr. Wallace B. Smith	San Francisco, Cal.	Albert M. Bender
B. G. Wills	San Francisco, Cal.	Joy Lichtenstein

DURING recent months, the Club has made excellent progress in its plan to restore the roll to its maximum of 500. The Membership Committee acknowledges with thanks the help of those who have aided in this effort to place the Club in a position where it can be of maximum service to its members. To this end, the Committee invites the continued interest of every member.

### Miscellany

¶ The New York Public Library, which was recently elected to membership, requests that we inform members that their file of the News-Letter lacks copies of Volume I, Numbers 1, 2 and 4. Members who possess these numbers for which they have no further use will confer a favor by sending them to the Club for transmittal to the Library.

¶ Slipcases for the Western Authors Series were completed in April and forwarded to those who had placed orders. The Club now has a supply of both types on hand (all-cloth at \$2.00, and cloth with morocco back at \$3.00), and future orders will be filled promptly. These attractively made cases form an ideal means of permanently preserving the sets and of protecting the various parts from loss or damage. A small supply of cases for the Mining Towns Series (uniform with the above and at the same prices) is also on hand for immediate delivery.

¶ The March number of the News-Letter completed the first two years of the quarterly, and the present issue begins Volume III. Meantime, several members have stated that they plan to have their files bound and have suggested that the Club undertake to supply those who wish this service. Accordingly, an appropriate and inexpensive binding has been designed, and members who wish to put their copies of the quarterly in this permanent form are invited to take advantage of the saving made possible by having a considerable number bound at one time.

A specimen bound volume may be seen at the office of the Club. Each volume (four numbers) is bound separately; the covering is a bookcloth of excellent quality, with the title stamped in gold on the back. The price is \$1.00 per volume. Members who wish this service should send their files of Volumes I and II to the Club. Unfortunately, the Club cannot supply missing numbers of Volume I, though a few of each of the four parts of Volume II are still available to those who may need them to complete their sets. On the completion of Volume III, and of subsequent volumes, bindings uniform with those now offered will be supplied to members who wish them.